



Dane County Land & Water Resources Department
Parks Division

Joleen Stinson, Parks Director
Laura M. Hicklin, Director
Joe Parisi, Dane County Executive

DATE: January 11, 2024

TO: Dane County Board of Supervisors

RE: Indian Lake County Park and Halfway Prairie Wildlife Area Master Plan

Dane County Parks develops master plans for Dane County recreation parks to guide the protection of unique natural, historical and cultural features, the future development of facilities, and the expansion of a park property over time. Implementation of master plans takes several years, sometimes decades, and occurs incrementally as funding and time allows. When an improvement recommended in a master plan is developed, additional planning takes place to iron out the many details and finer points that need to be addressed.

Indian Lake County Park is Dane County's largest recreation park at 791 acres; combined with the adjacent Halfway Prairie Wildlife Area to the north it encompasses just under 1000 acres of public land. A master plan for this park has never been completed.

Major topics that this plan addresses and provides recommendations for include:

- access to and management of nearly 300 acres of additional park land acquired in 2021;
- dog park/lake access area improvements;
- accessibility and inclusivity improvements;
- additional trails;
- proposed land cover;
- parking capacity.

The recommendations found in the plan were generated from public comments, analysis of existing property cultural, natural, and historic features and professional staff input.

Dane County Parks staff began working on the plan in March of 2022 and held seven public meetings between June of 2022 and November of 2023. Other outreach efforts included an interactive project web page, a survey to solicit public comments, plan updates posted in the park, email updates sent to stakeholders, and three mailings to neighbors of the park. Staff also attended individual meetings with the Friends of Indian Lake Park, the Ice Age Trail Alliance and staff from the Dane County Land and Water Resources Department.

The draft master plan was posted to the County project web page for review on September 1st, 2023 and included a public comment period that was extended from 60 days to 90 days ending on December 1st, 2023.

At the December 6th, 2023 Park Commission meeting, staff gave an additional presentation specifically on comments that were received on proposed access improvements to the youth group camp area and the proposed bicycle/maintenance road connection to Indian Trail Road.

The plan recommends development of a paved road and parking area that will serve the youth group camp and sledding hills, which are currently only accessible by foot. Many of the public comments received were opposed to the proposed addition of paved surfaces in the park and increased parking. The comments received against the proposed improvements stated that park users should have to walk or should visit a different park if they are not able to physically get to a popular recreation destination or amenity.

Dane County Parks is committed to providing outdoor access for all and there are a number of people who would benefit from having improved access to the group camp/sledding hill area. There are also a number of people who can't hike on the existing natural surface trail network that would also be able to use the proposed bike trail/maintenance road to further explore Indian Lake County Park. The youth group camp area is the most used outdoor education venue in the entire county park system and is often used by schools for outdoor field trips; the proposed group camp road insures people of all accessibility levels are able to participate. Other people who may benefit from improved access to the group camp might be grandparents wanting to bring grandkids sledding or parents with very young kids who can't make the walk back. It is not acceptable to suggest people should visit a different park if they are not able to physically get to a popular recreation destination or amenity. We cannot plan and design park access (or any public spaces) based solely on the needs of only healthy and able people.

The proposed group camp road will also provide year round reliable access for maintenance of the existing vault toilet building and warming house. Currently maintenance vehicle access to these facilities is extremely limited by steep slopes and lack of any direct improved surface access road.

Dane County Parks staff support these proposed improvements not only for improved access to the youth group camp and sledding hill area, but also for an extremely unique opportunity to provide a nearly 1 mile inclusive trail through some of Dane County's most beautiful Driftless area landscapes.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have questions or need additional information.

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